



# Consumer Alert

## Know Your Telephone Services and Costs

Do you routinely review your monthly telephone bill and its itemized charges? The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) recommends that all consumers check their monthly bills as a matter of routine. Telephone bills have become more complex and may include unfamiliar, inappropriate or incorrect charges. Therefore, it is wise for consumers to become familiar with the charges included on their monthly bills.

A monthly bill from your local telephone company will always include charges for basic local exchange service. Other charges may include:

- ◆ Costs for optional services, such as a second telephone line;
- ◆ Long distance charges from other companies;
- ◆ Voice messaging services;
- ◆ Inside-the-home wire maintenance contracts (an optional service); and
- ◆ Custom calling features (caller ID, call waiting, call forwarding and others). The specific names for these services can vary from company to company.

It is a good idea to review your bill each month to ensure that charges appear only for the services you have ordered. If a charge does not appear to be correct, call your local telephone company as soon as possible and request an explanation. Upon request, the company *must* provide a complimentary copy of the rate schedule applicable to your usage. Note, however, that the MPSC does not regulate the rates and charges for optional services, and the charges may change without notice.

The following charges may appear on your monthly local and long distance bills. These charges are permitted but not required under state or federal laws.

1. **Federal/State Subscriber Line Charges** - Covers a portion of the cost to operate and maintain the local telephone network.



2. **Universal Service Fund, or School/Library Internet Charge** - Provides assistance to rural and low-income telephone customers and helps provide technology to libraries and public schools. This charge varies by telephone company.
3. **Primary Interexchange Carrier Charge (PICC)** - Covers the costs of long distance, interstate, and intrastate telephone networks for use of the local telephone company's network. Charges may vary between telephone companies. (Applicable only to multiple line businesses.)
4. **Local Number Portability Charge** - Covers the cost for customers to keep the same telephone number under certain conditions.

State and federal taxes and the 9-1-1 surcharge(s), which covers the cost of operating the local emergency phone system, are required on all customers' bills.

**For questions regarding the above charges, call your local or long distance telephone company.**

Some actions you can take to protect yourself:

- ◆ Always review the summary of long distance calls and verify that you or someone in your household is responsible for those listed on the bill. Remember, you are responsible for calls placed from your telephone.
- ◆ Call your local telephone company to determine which calls are within your local calling area. Check your bill each month to make sure local calls are not billed at long distance rates.
- ◆ Immediately contact the telephone company and request an investigation if you don't think you are responsible for a particular call, or if you have questions regarding charges on your bill.

Because of the changing nature of the telecommunications industry, there may be charges for other telephone services on your bill that are not addressed in this alert (e.g., switching fee for changing long distance carriers or service, maintenance fee, minimum long distance calls charge, etc.). If you have questions about other service charges appearing on your bill, contact your telephone company. Always follow up with a letter and keep a copy for your records. Remember, basic local service cannot be terminated for non-payment of non-regulated services like custom calling features or inside-the-home wire maintenance contracts.

